

TO: The Honorable Whittington W. Clement
Secretary of Transportation

Mr. Philip A. Shucet
Transportation Commissioner

FROM: Phillip C. Stone

DATE: February 20, 2004

RE: Objection to STAR Proposal

The Star Proposal should be rejected and Fluor endorsed for these reasons:

- Star requires too much real estate and paves over too much of the Shenandoah Valley and the I-81 corridor. Fluor requires less real estate and pavement.
- VDOT's own traffic projections and the VPI study show that adding a third lane (additional lanes in congested areas) and truck climbing lanes will handle projected traffic through 2035. The additional pavement is not justified.
- The truck "flyovers" are unsightly and inappropriate for the beautiful corridor through which I-81 passes.
- Unless its tolls result in substantial diversion, a road of this magnitude will attract even more traffic, almost certainly attracting traffic from other routes. It will exacerbate the problems of air and noise pollution.
- To the extent the tolls lead to diversion, the area primary roads will become congested, thereby adversely affecting the quality of life in the Valley.
- It is too expensive. Tolls will need to be too steep, adversely affecting the trucking industry and their customers as well as diverting traffic to area roads. The bond financing will be a challenge.
- There will still be a significant mixture of cars and trucks. Trucks will need to drive in the two lanes normally driven by cars if they anticipate exiting the road some distance ahead. Hence, cars will likely still encounter congestion because of the presence of trucks. Not one inch of pavement will be completely free of trucks. Fluor would guarantee at least one lane exclusively for cars.
- An investment of this magnitude will almost assure that there will be no substantial improvement to the rail capacity of the corridor. If we are to contain the heavy traffic through the Shenandoah Valley with its resulting noise and air pollution, we must develop rail capacity. A road of the magnitude proposed by Star will obviate any incentive for rail investment.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS: While I recommend the FLUOR Proposal as a concept to go forward, I suggest that the following be added to any proposal eventually approved:

- 1) We should make it clear that new interstate exits will be protected from the kind of congested development we now see up and down the corridor at other exits. It is too costly to Virginia taxpayers for VDOT to be required to add additional streets, roads, and other traffic relief because of bad planning.
- 2) There ought to be at least one lane for the exclusive use of cars even if trucks are required to remain in one lane between the time they enter the mixed lanes and the time they exit the road.
- 3) We need to develop an aggressive traffic management plan immediately. We should not wait for the proposals to be completed. Traffic management would include the following:
 - On inclines where trucks have difficulty maintaining their speed, they should be restricted to the right lane so they do not hold up traffic in the left lane.
 - The state law requiring passing vehicles to return to the right lane after passing should be enforced.
 - Speed needs to be managed better. We also need to consider whether trucks should be restricted to a speed less than cars.
- 4) We should be more aggressive in exploring a rail option. Through conversations with other states and existing carriers, we should press forward with the development of a fast rail line to divert more truck traffic from I-81. Because of the possibility that existing rail companies may not be sufficiently creative in their thinking, we should consult others who are experts in rail service.
- 5) Consideration should be given to folding into the I-81 project several bypass projects in urban areas that will substantially affect I-81 traffic patterns. For example, the limited amount of space available to expand I-81 in Harrisonburg and Winchester might make a bypass particularly helpful. By including these in the project, their construction could be expedited and a revenue source provided.

February 20, 2004

The Honorable Whittington W. Clement
Secretary of Transportation
9th Street Office Building # 523
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Mr. Philip A. Shucet
Transportation Commissioner
1401 E. Broad Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Gentlemen:

First I would like to say that it has been an honor to be a member of the Advisory Panel. The task assigned to us was not an easy one and I did not take the responsibility light heartily. As you know I was one of the two dissenting votes against the Star Solutions proposal. My decision was based on the following concerns.

The Federal funding of this project is not guaranteed as we are led to believe. The budget at this time has a threat of veto by the President if the amount requested is not reduced. Also, we are not the only state that is requesting this money. There are several other states such as Texas, who has an advantage with having the President and the House Majority Leader from that state. Also, they have more representatives in Congress than we do. Furthermore, with this type of allocation it may put Virginia's other road systems at risk. Where would we be if construction had to be stopped due to lack of funding? What liability would Virginia have?

Another issue is the tolls that are to be imposed. The effects could be devastating to the economic development of a part of Virginia that is already behind in development. Not only will the trucking, manufacturing and businesses in this corridor be affected but the people who live and work there will bear the brunt of the tolls. Businesses will look elsewhere to build or will not expand their operations. As confirmed by the Reebie study done for VDOT, tolls will cause a significant number of cars and trucks to divert off of I-81 to other routes that cannot handle the influx of traffic making these roads unsafe. Tolls will stifle the manufacturing economy and employment base. If toll projections do not materialize it will put a drain on Virginia's already strained revenues. Profit in the highly competitive trucking industry is averaging about \$.04 a mile. Imposing tolls that are nearly seven times the cost of the trucking industry profit will have a dramatic impact on operations. This would have a severe impact on local trucking and industry vendors. It will certainly put many out of business.

It has not been proven that the plan as proposed for separated truck lanes has any safety benefit. Cars and trucks will not be truly separated since approximately 30 - 40% of the truck traffic is local. Building only, 6 truck only interchanges, it will not give trucks the needed access to the remaining 84 interchanges. The fact is a significant number of

trucks will have to use the car lanes. The "flyover" concept will increase merging interaction between trucks and cars, which will lead to more accidents. Dividing the truck lanes from cars with only rumble strips or grass medians does not prevent out-of-control vehicles from careening into other lanes, which has happened in some of the most devastating crashes on I-81.

The Valley of Virginia is one of the state's natural treasures. The scenic beauty brings many tourist to this area. With the additional lanes and flyovers it will change the whole look of the valley. What was once beautiful will now become crowded with more vehicles and the air will become more polluted. The environmental impact will be detrimental to the corridor.

In closing I feel the Star proposal will have devastating impacts on the economy and environment. The Fluor proposal is much more realistic in terms of additional lanes and truck climbing lanes and more consistent with VDOT's own analysis of I-81. It appears this proposal will have less of an environmental and economic impact. They also do not depend on Federal money to fund this project.

Sincerely,

Original with signature on file in the Secretary of
Transportation's Office.

Dee Bowles
PPTA Panel Member